Program Continuity:

Elementary Education In Action

Program Continuity: ECS to Grade Six

Alberta
EDUCATION
Curriculum

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Program Continuity:
Elementary Education in Action

1 An Introduction

This series, called **Program Continuity: Elementary Education in Action**, consists of five booklets:

1. An Introduction: An exploration of some of the assumptions of program continuity.
2. In the Classroom: An exploration of how teachers can promote continuity for students.
3. In the School: An exploration of how administrators can promote continuity in schools.
4. Between Home and School: An exploration of parental involvement.
5. Assessment in the Classroom: An exploration of assessment practices as a guide to evaluating students' growth.

Based on certain beliefs about teaching and learning, this series serves as a resource for schools in making program continuity a reality and in designing strategies for its implementation. While it is hoped that the series will be helpful to individuals, the basic assumption is that program continuity is best addressed through discussion among all those involved—among children, parents and school staff.

Each booklet is prefaced with a brief overview of the contents, entitled "Looking Ahead." "Discussion Topics" conclude each booklet. These are designed to facilitate the deliberations of each school as program continuity is thoughtfully addressed with attention to the unique needs and configuration of each school district.

Of course, the series may be read as a whole. Or the reader may wish to begin with one booklet of particular and personal interest. The central figure in all five booklets is the child and the central idea, how we as partners—parents and educators—can best help children recognize themselves as competent, self-directed learners.

Elementary Education in Action

Consider the following four teaching situations:

In one elementary classroom, children developed a serial story. Through oral storytelling in an imaginative mode, attention was given to the logical consistency of the created tale. At first, characters and a setting were established: an elf, a blob and Toronto. Working around the circle, each child contributed to the story and if no contribution was forthcoming the child could elect to pass. The activity demanded attentive listening, memory skills, attention to cause and effect, awareness of story elements and concern for logical consistency as the story unfolded. The activity was stopped mid-way, as it was clear that the storytelling was floundering. It was an excellent opportunity to reinforce ideas about what makes a good story. The children talked mainly about the appropriateness of the character to the setting—an elf in Toronto! The activity, both in concept and in action provided a valuable teaching and learning opportunity.

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A colleague recently shared a story of a group of young children and their teacher who found a bee dying on a hot concrete step near the school entrance. The teacher immediately stepped on the bee to end its misery. Yet her gesture of compassion perhaps neglected an opportunity to nurture the children's ethical sensibilities and judgment. After discussion with the children the bee might have been moved to a cool, shaded place to enable a more gentle death. Such experiences, common to the child who has an uncanny eye for small things in the natural world, lend themselves to exploration. The perplexities of life and death engage us all. And, when we reveal our shared perplexity we are co-learners, modelling our puzzlement, our desire to know and to make sense of a confusing world.

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In a primary classroom the children were engaged in a long-term project that helped reinforce the difficult mathematical concept of place value. Using Dienes Blocks the children constructed the numbers from one and then recorded each numeral on a strip of paper where columns indicated thousands, hundreds, tens and ones. Each strip had 20 rows. The strips were then glued together to form long rolls resembling cash

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register tape. One boy had reached the 1600s while others were in the mid-hundreds. The activity was undertaken at a time of the child's choosing, it took only a few minutes and did not necessitate multiple sets of Dienes Blocks. Not only was the individual learner respected but flexibility in timing and choice allowed efficient use of classroom material.

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In a study of the family, children drew maps of the inside of their houses. This is a fairly "typical" activity, an opportunity for children to represent three-dimensional space in two dimensions and to struggle with spatial representation. What was valuable for the observer was not so much the activity itself but the insights it provided. Stephanie's house had a richly detailed interior where there were many framed "pictures" on one wall; each had the initials "SC" above the frame. When I asked Stephanie about the pictures, they were certificates ("SC"), awards she had won in gymnastics, piano and Chinese school. Nicholas, on the other hand, had focussed entirely on the basement where he plays ice hockey. Soccer nets were in evidence along with a large brown snake-like line—pipes that get in the way of the game. Nicholas's dad is always on his team, an insight into Nicholas's place in the family! Another boy spent the entire time drawing an intricate and well-proportioned computer and computer workstation in the centre of his house.

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The four examples are valuable for several reasons. They remind us that children "dwell in possibilities." Each moment of each day is an occasion for deeper understanding of the world around them. They are capable of being surprised, puzzled, wrong and delighted. They are continuous learners and have a marked urge to know, to do, to make sense.

The examples also tell us that this urge can find a home in classrooms. Recognizing and capitalizing on children's interests, ideas and feelings, building on their experience are important steps in fostering their desire to learn, in supporting, nurturing, stimulating and challenging their efforts to do so. Of course, this is what good teachers and parents have always done.

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These examples also give life to an idea called program continuity. This idea is certainly not new. Many teachers and parents have made use of it. This idea is being used now to set a direction for implementing ECS to Grade 6 curriculum. **This direction confirms that learning is a continuous experience and that children learn in different ways at different times, even though they happen to be the same age.**

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There is of course no step-by-step way to achieve continuity. This series of booklets offers some things to try, some things to think about in our day-to-day practice.

Looking Ahead

This booklet examines two dimensions of program continuity—continuity and integration.

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The what of teaching and learning, the provincial curriculum, is a given. Program continuity addresses the how. It represents a commitment to a view of teaching and learning, not in the sense of specifics of practice, but rather encouraging the use of a set of beliefs or principles to shape our practices. These assumptions are outlined in Appendix A. Its intent is to foster and enhance students' development and learning, to promote school success and help students meet the expectations set out in the provincial curricula. Within this context, the following addresses continuity, or the continuous nature of learning and integration, or the need to link, connect, build on experiences.

Continuity

Learning is continuous firstly in a personal sense, demanding respect for the individual learner. It is also continuous in that no experience is without context, without links with what has gone before or what follows. The task of parents and teachers is then to help learners recognize and use those links to understand their experiences. It is to give learners tools to develop new or alternate ways of making those links. This linking must be fostered from grade to grade, from subject to subject, from home and community to school.

When continuity guides what takes place in the classroom or at home children are not stopped from learning new concepts or skills because they are advancing too quickly. Nor are they pushed on to learn things without the necessary preparation. Children learn skills and concepts as they are ready to do so, and if those skills and concepts are of interest and a challenge to them. Program continuity speaks to our need to respect this, and to support learners as they grow in knowledge, skills and self-confidence.

The key thing in any classroom may be to find out what the child is trying to do and help her or him do it. The necessary task is being supportive to the child's development, of recognizing the child as a

competent, self-directed learner. The teacher is responsible for teaching the curriculum in such a way that this occurs.

Integration

For the young child, there is no disintegration, there is only connectedness and linking. Within the school, there is often a tension between the child's approach to learning and the more traditional approach to learning found in school subjects. Integration is an attempt to deal with this tension, by using strategies and techniques that point to connections. Possible connections may be fostered between:

- events of yesterday and today
- happenings at home and at school
- ideas in one school subject and another
- thoughts and feelings
- predictions and observations
- actions and consequences
- personal experiences and those of others.

The provincial curriculum may be approached in a number of ways—some more helpful to children than others. One way to foster integration is to organize the curriculum around key ideas—ideas drawn from various school subjects and from personal experience.

For example, one such key idea, is the concept of representation. Much of what happens in schools may be characterized as representation. We express our understanding of experience by representing it through language, mathematics, art, music, drama, movement. Thus, one way to forge connections between these various expressive forms is through the concept of representation. From the first days of school the concept may be introduced. Our names, for example, are early representations of who we are. So is drawing. Gradually, children understand that representational forms are symbolic encodings of experience, encodings that are social in nature. Further, with guidance, students expand their capacity to use various forms with increasing sophistication. A concept such as representation gives coherence to the children's work across subject boundaries, across grades, and it links school experience with personal experience in the world beyond.

Through integration, children connect what they know to what they are learning in other school subjects. They learn to use their writing skills in all school subjects. They use their problem-solving skills in all subjects, not just mathematics. They develop their ability to analyse information and draw conclusions, not just in science experiments but in other subjects as well. And they are encouraged to use their new knowledge in daily life, not just in school.

Both continuity and integration are shaped and guided by developmental principles. In both language development and in the development of early mathematical thinking, there is convincing evidence that children are able to understand complex processes. This is especially true when the child is engaged with concrete materials and in activities that have real purpose. For example, a young child understands that two candies and two more make four but is confused if asked "what does two plus two make?" Establishing links between abstract symbols and concrete experience can make all the difference for young learners. (See Appendix B for further developmental principles). Of course, while it is helpful to have such principles to guide our decisions, the individual child must always be first in our thoughts and decisions.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

What meaning does the concept of program continuity hold for your school? For your teaching? In your home?

As a school staff member are you familiar with the concepts and intent of program continuity?

Are school practices generally consistent with the assumptions and actions outlined in Appendix A?

What do developmental principles look like in practice?

How do we understand children's responses to the world as a reflection of developmental principles?

How do we communicate developmentally appropriate practices to colleagues and parents?

Is our thinking about children's potential limited by developmental expectations?

Continuity—Assumptions and Actions

Assumptions Implicit in the Continuity Policy	Continuity-in-Action
Teachers respect children as learners.	Within program guidelines teachers and children choose topics, activities, ways of presenting information Scheduling is flexible.
Skills are taught when needed and in relevant ways.	Ongoing informal assessment is used. Skills instruction arises from children's work and is provided in context.
Learners are responsible for their learning.	Learning contracts, portfolios and anthologies are used. Learning goals are established and reviewed periodically. Children are involved in self-assessment and in conferences with parents and teachers
Learning experiences are significant in a human sense (morally and intellectually).	Each school determines its major purposes. "Key ideas" can form a framework for school-level instruction decisions. Children relate school experiences to their lives.
Children learn with and from peers and from a variety of adults.	Flexible instruction groups, peer teaching and buddy systems are evident. Resource people, including parents, interact with children.
Teachers establish a "community of learners" while respecting the individual.	Class goals are discussed. Children work individually, in small groups and large groups. Flexible work schedules predominate. Powerful, shared experiences create a sense of group history.
Teachers and children actively seek connections.	Home and school liaison is established. Learning is demystified—teachers, children, parents discuss the nature and process of real learning (meaningful, relevant, lasting).

Assumptions Implicit in the Continuity Policy	Continuity-in-Action
Teachers, children and parents view learning as a personal quest.	Teachers and children are enthusiastic about classroom events. Learners are active inquirers. Learning outcomes are diverse. Unexpected outcomes often shed new insight for the group. A tolerance for uncertainty grows.
Teachers and children use ongoing assessment strategies.	Children have high expectations for their work. Help is sought where problems are encountered. Learning is seen as a search for meaning.
Teachers believe that children learn in diverse ways.	Children are engaged in diverse activities at any one time and throughout the day. Diversity includes groupings, activities, materials, topics areas including off-campus.
Teachers believe that complex ideas develop over time and with experience.	Key ideas are used as an organizing framework for school-level instruction decisions. Connections with these organizing ideas are actively sought.
Teachers are learners.	Teachers keep journal records in which they reflect on their practices. They actively seek professional development opportunities.
School experiences challenge all participants such that quality in all dimensions is actively pursued.	Teachers and children are actively engaged in inquiry. Deep understanding is sought. Quality is the standard for completed projects.

Developmental Indicators

Younger Primary Child

Physical

Rapid growth may be accompanied by coordination loss.
Fine muscle coordination often weak.
High energy but subject to fatigue.
Right Left dominance developing

Emotional

Friendships are important.
Enjoys routines.
Anxiety about, for example, security, acceptance. Developing empathetic responses

Language

Rapid growth—enjoys rhymes, nonsense verse.
Overgeneralizes rules; for example, plurals and tenses.
Growth in literacy skills.
Retells stories and shares original stories.
Begins to print stories using invented spelling.

Social

Cooperative, compliant, polite but wants a reason for rules.
Understands rules in relation to a specific situation.
Works with peers and alone.
Interests often tied to the immediate.
Generally relies on the good will and guidance of adults.

Intellectual

Uses all senses to explore the world.
Curious and enthusiastic about learning.
Cause-and-effect relationships of interest but linkages may differ from those of adults.
Action and thought may be concurrent or interchangeable throughout an activity.
Interested in symbolic forms.
Generally likes to complete tasks.

Older Primary Child

Physical

More stable growth period allows for improvement in coordination; endurance improves, skills are practised and refined.
Visual acuity, strength, balance and speed improve.
High energy but subject to fatigue.
Right Left dominance established.

Emotional

Peer acceptance is important. Begins to assert independence from adults and may seek new models.
Needs to feel in control of situations.
Learns appropriate ways to express feelings.

Language

Uses language to express and clarify ideas.
Poses own questions and seeks answers.
Literacy skills continue to expand.
Uses print to gain information.
Concern for mechanics may impede flow of writing.

Social

Generally very compliant and accepting of rules.
Enjoys working with peers and seeks approval.
Outgoing, developing wider interests.
Moves from reliance on adults to greater independence.

Intellectual

Listening skills develop.
Interested in collecting and classifying.
Predicts, gathers information and evaluates outcomes.
Uses concrete materials but can also reflect on actions.
Generally thinks before acting.
Generally avoids being deceived by perception.
Conserves: focusses on parts while retaining an image of the whole.
Displays reversible thought: predicts and anticipates.
Uses a variety of symbolic forms to represent concrete experience.
Demonstrates greater concern for details.

Upper Elementary Child

Physical

Rapid and uneven growth at onset of puberty (11–13 girls, 12–14 boys) accompanied by restlessness, fatigue.
Awkwardness may occur with growth spurt. Strength levels vary greatly.
Energetic, appetite increases.

Emotional

May show interest in close friendships with same sex.
Begins to seek identity through comparison with peers.
Interest in opposite sex usually explored within the safety of the group.
Demonstrates increased responsibility and confidence.
Starts to test limits imposed by others.

Language

Argumentation skills develop.
Discussion strategies extend.
Begins to listen critically.
Literacy skills develop in complexity.
Critical reading skills expand with a sensitivity to textual features.
Becoming skilled in content reading strategies.
Writing demonstrates attention to effect on audience.

Social

Begins to challenge rules.
Has strong need for belonging. Peer groups, especially same-sex groups, assume greater importance.
Interest in social issues emerges.
Reliance on adults decreases as greater independence is achieved and as peers become more important.

Intellectual

Memory improves dramatically.
Sorts and organizes information
Appreciates the impact of change on the physical and social environment. Makes predictions and tests them.
Begins to think about abstract ideas and to seek and analyse relationships between actions and ideas
Develops increasingly logical and complex plans to direct action.
Explores a variety of viewpoints.
Seeks alternative solutions to problems.
Begins to manipulate symbolic forms without reference to direct concrete experience.
Demonstrates greater concern for details.

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Program Continuity:
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2 In the Classroom

Looking Ahead

This booklet looks at how teachers can promote program continuity for students. It begins with a description of the first day of a new school year as an example of how typical classroom practice is shaped and guided by continuity. Several topics—classroom environment, learning strategies, learning centres and content organization are then discussed in an effort to clarify further the intent and implications inherent when we speak of continuity.

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To put continuity into practice in the classroom is to act out of deep respect for the child as learner. It means attempting not only to understand the child's world but also to empower the child to act in that world. There is, of course, no step-by-step way to achieve continuity, no step-by-step manner to demonstrate that respect. Individual teachers in individual classrooms continue to find better and different strategies. This booklet offers some things to try and some things to think about in our day-to-day practice.

The First Day of School

On the first day of school we establish our purpose. Why are we here? What do we hope to achieve together? These are, of course, evolving questions and, too, they are not without boundaries. They are bounded by the learner expectations found in the curriculum. They are limited to those decisions teachers can and are prepared to make together with their students. For while each student is a responsible member in that community, in the last analysis it is the teacher who is responsible for the total community. Within that context, on the first day of school we

develop a statement or vision for our classroom. By so doing we have established that:

- our work together has purpose
- the purpose is a common one
- the classroom operates as a community where cooperation and competition have a place.

As classroom experiences are introduced by the teacher or initiated by the children we then have some way to review those experiences, to see whether they further our purpose, to see the part they play in realizing our vision. Sometimes an unexpected event means that we revise our statement. Certainly, a review is in order as a new member joins the group part way through the school year. If the school has developed a set of key ideas or goals, these ought to be explained to the children. As a class we can search for the connections between our class and school goals. So one aspect of developing a community is underway, that of establishing a common purpose.

However, establishing such a purpose and achieving it are two distinct processes. The latter draws on the relationships that develop as people get to know one another. One way to achieve this goal early in the year is to start with a focus on learning about one another. This allows us to build a learning community while accomplishing program goals in an integrated manner.

As we move into this exploration, we focus our attention on strategies for getting, giving and receiving information such as the use of family records, personal anecdotes, empirical data such as height and weight, information about family members and family origins. Gathering such information engages the class in individual research, group research, group reporting—using print, oral communication, photo essays, dramatization, etc. Such an exploration establishes a baseline of knowledge about one another and engages children in many of the learning strategies they will use, refine and extend throughout the year. But where from here? We need to find ways to bind the community together as the year progresses. Shared experiences build such a sense of community and provide collegial events to which future connections can be made. Such experience can be induced, or it may occur naturally. In either event, the community is inevitably drawn together.

Certain elements help us make our classrooms places where continuity is integral to all that goes on. Let's look more closely at what those elements might be. This discussion is intended to stimulate thought and is not prescriptive in any sense.

Classroom Environments

Classroom environments convey tacit messages about the beliefs and assumptions that underly our instruction practices. As we establish our classrooms each fall we need to consciously reflect on what we value, on our beliefs about teaching and learning, on what we hope to accomplish.

The classroom is a community of learners, where what keeps the experience fresh and vital is that the teacher is a co-learner with the children. The teacher not only teaches but learns from and with the children. The classroom, seen as a community of learners, projects a number of powerful ideas.

One of these ideas has to do with **ownership**. The classroom is not only the teacher's but is shared with the children. Together, teachers and students strive for harmony, support, challenge and stimulation. The implication is that while the teacher may have some ideas about how to make the space attractive and warm, major decisions about its physical design may be made cooperatively. How do such beliefs translate into practice?

Looking back at our description, one of the tasks on the first day of school is to establish mutual purposes. Together, teacher and students might discuss what their goals are for the year, what will help them achieve their goals, how they will organize the physical space, what kinds of furnishings and materials will be needed and how those will be organized. The teacher may have the space organized efficiently and attractively on the first day of school but she/he should make it clear that these are merely tentative arrangements subject to change. Several plans follow merely as suggestions for a starting place. (See Appendix A.)

Some decisions about the classroom environment are limited by the existing structure; for example, access to power, traffic patterns given exterior doors, availability of furnishings, access to natural light, access to water, noise factors. Some educators suggest that classrooms be

arranged around a quadrant: wet dry noisy quiet. Others suggest grouping furniture to encourage small-group interaction with easy access to materials arranged on open shelves. Further, teachers need to rethink their assumptions periodically. Recent literature challenges previous advice to teachers to place the reading corner in a quiet, protected area preferably lit by natural light. It has been shown that placing the reading area in a more central place encourages participation with books and with other readers. Perhaps what is needed is to think about trying to make classrooms more homey and less institutional; a central reading area reminds one of children at home who want to be close to the action.

The current approach to writing, which culminates in a published piece, respects the development of complex ideas over time. In an upper elementary group one teacher designed a unit of study based on the novel, *Anne of Green Gables*. The children were engaged in a number of projects that enabled them to research the context of the novel. One group researched the manners and attire of the day, another explored the past using an oral history approach. Guests from the local senior citizen home were invited to talk about their early life. Yet another group researched local newspapers of the day, a project that culminated in publishing a facsimile written, of course, by the children themselves. Each group was assisted by a parent advisor, a pertinent way to involve parents in school activities.

Another example of the development of complex ideas over time comes from a primary classroom. The teacher had become very interested in young children's philosophical thinking after taking a summer course. The children had become interested in what constitutes "realness." Through a number of extended discussions they searched for counter examples for each claim of realness. For example, they proposed that real things could talk, but the fish in the classroom aquarium seemed to belie this claim. One thoughtful girl decided that, "You don't know if things are real, you need to decide for yourself if it is real or not." The topic arose almost daily over an extended period. Christmas was a great motivator with Santa and his elves in every shopping centre! Early in the new year two boys presented a puppet play about a king who drowned and who was saved by a monkey. One child responding to the play said that it was not real, "Only God can make you back alive." One boy whose father had died discounted this claim. The boy who had portrayed the drowned king reported that the story was real "because I died and now I am back alive." He had, in fact, drowned

the previous summer and had been pronounced clinically dead before intervention by the paramedics. He went on to recount memories of a light and a man coming to help him and a feeling of freedom from anxiety. When asked about dying and whether it was real, he emphatically replied, "Of course. . .I'm real, aren't I?"

What is key is that the children's exploration of a perplexing question is allowed to flourish over time. And what is equally important is that this topic is as engaging for the teacher as it is for the children—a topic where teachers and students are truly co-learners. Such exploration is a reminder of the deep wonderings of children's minds and causes one to reflect anew on their capabilities, interests and needs.

In sum, time is seen as a resource for learning.

Learning Strategies

One typical system and school objective is to help children learn how to learn. Of course, children have learned how to learn before school. The recent literature on literacy and on early mathematical thinking indicates that teachers may find some valuable clues in the informal family environment to guide their thinking about learning environments. Additionally, school learning skills are best learned in context, that is, by learning about something. Nevertheless, with these cautions in mind, children are independent learners, and so need opportunities to act as such—to develop not only the skills necessary to direct life-long learning but to recognize their disposition to do so.

Alberta Education's curriculum documents reflect the importance of learning skills in a context. Inquiry is a predominant feature of three core areas, social studies, science and mathematics. If inquiry is a generic learning skill, then children need opportunities to engage in the process and to see its value for themselves.

An upper elementary teacher had been helping children apply the problem-solving (or inquiry) strategy as outlined in the social studies, science and mathematics curricula. The challenge was to design a package that would protect an egg when dropped from a second-storey height to the ground. The solutions were as unique and as varied as the children. One was to attach a set of balloons to a box containing the egg, a parachute in effect. Another was to encase the egg in

elastic bands. Yet another was to encase the egg in a gelatin package inside a plastic jar. Readers are invited to engage in the inquiry process to determine which solutions were effective.

As teachers observe children engaging in the inquiry process, they are able to gauge their developing skills:

- What investigations interest the child?
- What senses are used in the process?
- What attributes of objects are apprehended by this child?
- Do the child's predictions draw on relevant information?
- What kinds of information sources does the child use?
- How does the child organize the information and communicate findings?
- What processes are used to interpret or evaluate findings?

When teachers think about what learning entails they are confronted by the role of representation. In the inquiry process, for example, the learner must represent her his findings to communicate them with others. Representation may be in a variety of ways, through drama, music, art, mathematics, language. The learner represents the experience, re-creates, reviews, re-enacts it, so that it may be reflected on, made personal and shared. The child's representation, both in terms of choice of form and in terms of content, is a valuable guide for the teacher endeavouring to understand the child. It is in this sense that teachers move out of their predominantly "doing" role to become observers and interpreters. If teachers assume the connections are there, if they respect each child as learner striving to make sense, they will more readily see the connections being forged. And if those connections are not "right," is this not equally valuable?

Representation as a learning strategy depends on experiences that engage the learner and in turn lead to representation itself. Shared experiences are valuable, provided each child may then choose his or her particular way of representing the experience—a story, a television story done with overhead transparencies, a scripted drama, a painting, an audio- or video-taped account with cue cards, credits and musical backing.

A primary class might undertake a study of pets. First, they brainstorm to find out what they know, what they wish to learn and how they might go about it. Learning activities are planned and executed, including a

visit to a pet store, a visit from a veterinarian and a pet show. After varied experiences that build knowledge and understanding and that draw on children's skills, the children choose a variety of ways to represent what they have learned. Their projects include group and individual efforts and respect their varied interests, skills and abilities. Of course, completed projects are shared with the group-at-large and by so doing all children have yet another opportunity to replay their experiences. In this final presentation they are exposed to a multitude of representational techniques, techniques they may use at another time.

Students Helping Students

Students helping other students (whether peers or older or younger students) may be a great boon to students and to the teacher. A buddy system may be established between two instruction groups, perhaps a group of 11-year-olds with the 6-year-olds. Timetables are aligned to ensure that the older children are available to work one-on-one with their partners at appropriate times. As well, both groups may share projects, use one another as an audience for reading stories and presenting culminations of a unit of study. One school paired junior high and ECS students. They shared class visits to the skating rink, lunch times and class projects. Such pairing has benefits that extend beyond the academic—relationships are established that greatly contribute to the school community. Essential attributes such as compassion, caring and respect are natural outcomes.

Often children experiencing difficulty can be helped by peers or older or younger students who seem to have just the right language and the right way to overcome the particular hurdle. Such teaching can be informal, used as the need arises or consciously enhanced by grouping particular children for class assignments. As all good teachers know, teaching itself seems to help the teacher clarify his or her own understanding. Thus, students benefit mutually.

Instruction Strategies

Program continuity is compatible with a variety of instruction strategies, both large- and small-group as well as individual instruction. As in any good teaching, the teacher selects the strategy most appropriate to meet the needs of the students. One strategy teachers might wish to explore is organizing the classroom into learning centres.

Typically, "a learning centre" is an area within the classroom where an individual child or a small group of children gather to work on a particular task. The learning activity may be self-selected from among a number of activities planned by the teacher. Children may be assigned to an activity based on assessed need, or the activity may be one initiated by the child or a group of children.

Learning centres are very familiar as part of the ECS program. Even in ECS, a learning centre may have a focus such as writing, be equipped with materials for writing or dramatic play or block building. One disadvantage to such organization is that children might assume that writing occurs only in this one area. Writing should be an integral part of children's various endeavours, as each child decides that this form of representation is appropriate to his or her needs.

Learning centres can be organized around specific skills such as manipulating number facts, topics such as print-making or curriculum areas such as science. Most teachers have at least one learning centre, the reading area. In this area there are often comfortable chairs, cushions, perhaps an old sofa, a variety of books including children's own books attractively displayed. There may be paper and writing tools, crayons, tape recorders, earphones and often a parent who reads and is read to.

Other common centres are a game centre with a variety of games designed to provide skills practice, and a mathematics area housing mathematics manipulatives including Cuisenaire rods, Dienes blocks, measurement tools, geoboards, Unifix cubes, counting materials, bean sticks, squared paper, math task cards, attribute blocks. Sometimes learning centres are organized around a unit of study, perhaps Pioneer Life. Here are displayed a collection of artifacts, photographs and reading materials that are useful as children research the topic.

Space is always a problem, as is furniture. Generally, a flat working surface is preferable. Where tables are not available, flat-topped desks can be arranged in groups. However, materials for a learning centre can be arranged on open shelves or on a countertop.

In some classrooms, "learning centres" designates a particular time in the program. Children choose or are assigned to a particular area or activity. In other classrooms access to learning centres is used as an incentive, a place to go when assigned classroom tasks are complete.

Learning centres generally provide children with an opportunity to choose and to initiate activities. The choice and use of learning centres reflects the teacher's philosophy of how children learn and what learning should occur in classrooms.

Content Integration

Having organized the classroom, attention must be given to the integration of content. A number of ways to organize content or units of study are currently being used by teachers. One might organize content by subject matter, key ideas, themes. Whatever approach is chosen, care must be taken to avoid isolated and disconnected studies for children. Further, the organizing focus should be key ideas or concepts, not trivial facts or pieces of subject matter. Instruction may incorporate teacher-directed group activities, child-selected activities, child-initiated activities, learning centres and field trips. Where a particular subject area is the impetus for the unit of study, every attempt ought to be made to forge connections with other subjects.

Appendix B illustrates the advantage of using key ideas to establish connections among the curricula. In this case, the natural world becomes a boundless source of inquiry. The rationale and objectives of the unit and program components of one aspect of inquiry are also included. The web details a potential unit of study. While such a unit may be a science unit, opportunities are sought and inserted for the development of skills in areas other than science. For example, language arts, as the children talk, report, read and write about their evolving understanding; math, as children graph seasonal changes, temperature, animal life, measure tree circumference, tree height, length of shadow at various times of the day and throughout the year; health, as children observe the growth and death of living things; social studies, as they discover the interdependence of social and natural worlds.

One way in which this kind of content organization enhances continuity is by grouping experiences in a particular way. In this case, the major emphasis is science education, both in the choice of content and in the use of the inquiry process. As well, home–school continuity is enhanced when opportunities are provided for family involvement. Appendix B details potential activities that may arise through observations conducted in family backyards. The same unit of study might be conceptualized as the exploration of a key idea; namely, care

of the environment. Such organization enhances continuity by helping children group experiences intellectually and affectively as they build a deeper understanding of the key idea. In this sense, the choice of activity is secondary but essential to the development of the key idea. The advantage of the latter organization is that continuity across grades is more likely to be enhanced. "Care for the environment" is a major objective of the science curriculum; it links the content segments: Earth, Space and Time; Living Things and the Environment; Matter and Energy. Further, care for the environment is a major objective of the social studies curriculum, part of the concept of interdependence.

Skill Integration

Another way to provide continuity for students is to emphasize the transfer of skills learned in one subject, to other subjects and to life situations. Problem solving, inquiry, thinking and communication skills come to mind. This integration of specific skills helps students see and make links and connections in their daily activities.

Conclusion

Some teachers are already making program continuity a reality in their classrooms. This booklet outlines some things that may be helpful. Some of these you may have tried already, some you may wish to try. You may also have found some things not mentioned here that really work for you. In that case, let us know* so we can pass on "the good word." It's easy to forget that continuity is a journey and not a destination—a journey we are all on because we want the best for students.

*This can be done by contacting the Curriculum Branch, Alberta Education, at 422-4872.

Discussion Topics

What learning strategies are typical in the classroom? Are there alternate strategies that would benefit the learners?

How is content typically organized? Do we need to consider alternate approaches?

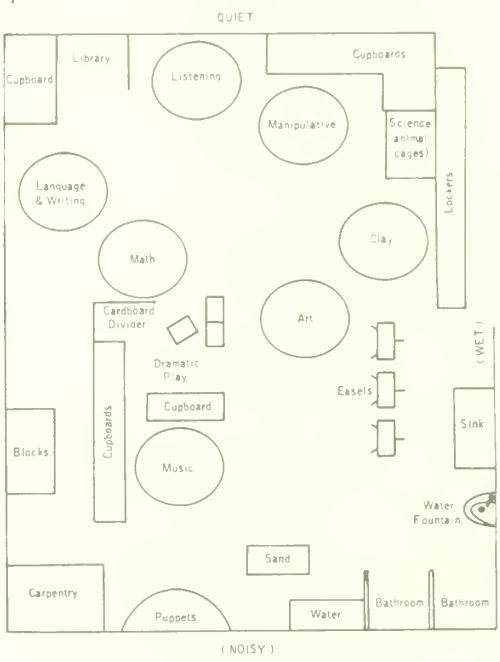
Are practices generally consistent with the assumptions and actions outlined in Appendix C? Do I disagree with or wish to modify this list? Do I need to reconsider some of my typical practices?

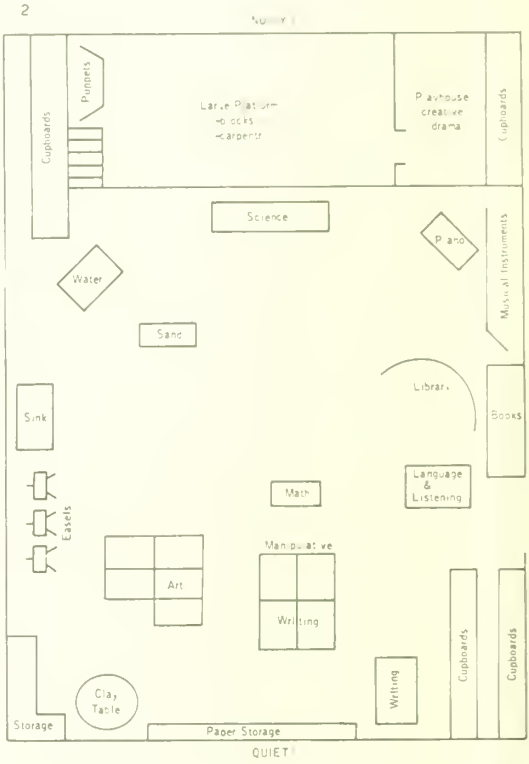
As a co-learner with children how do I use what I learn?

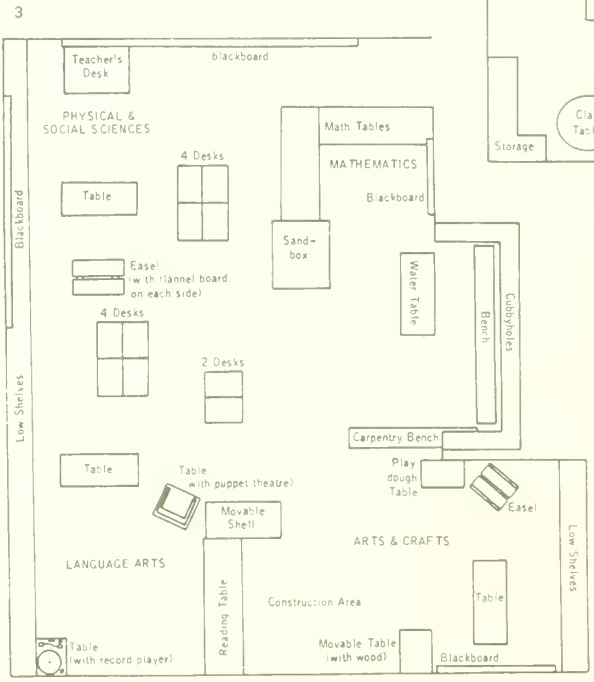
How would my classroom environment be characterized?

What message does that environment convey to others?

How are peer interaction and cooperation encouraged?







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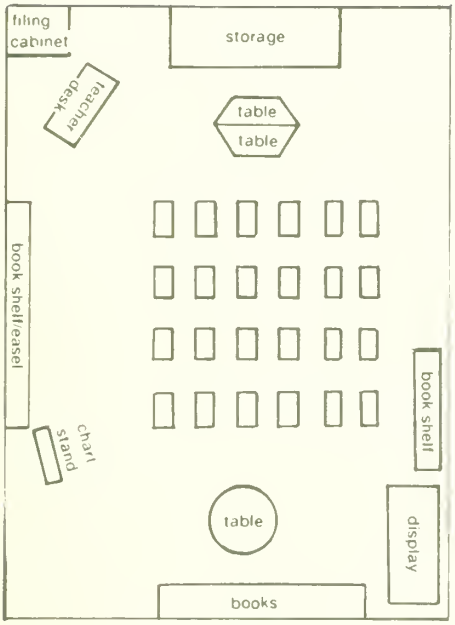
filing cabinet
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teacher desk
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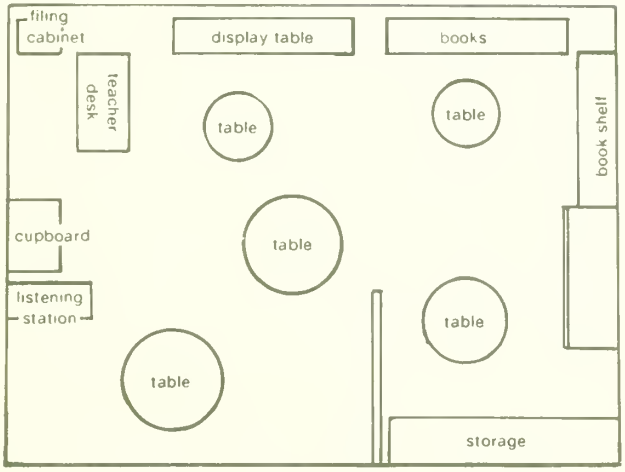
chart stand
book shelf
table
display
books

5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teacher desk
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table
book shelf
cupboard
table
listening station
table
table
storage

The Natural World as a Source of Learning

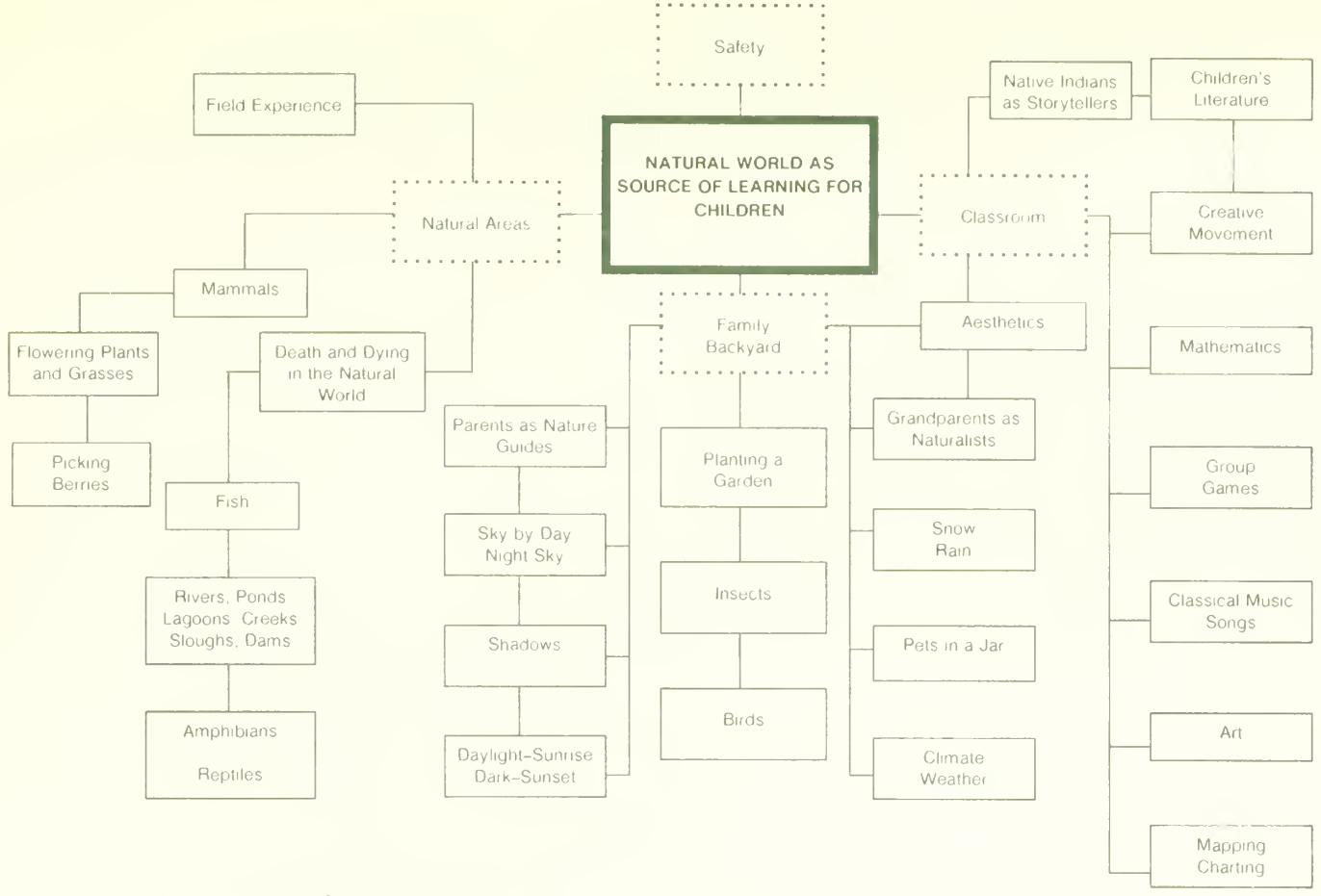
RATIONALE

Preservation of the natural world depends on a profound respect for the environment and an awareness of its relationship to our lives. Children can best learn the ethic of caring for all living things by spending time in the backyard, the schoolyard, in natural areas and in the wilderness.

OBJECTIVES

- To help children develop a sense of the complexities and richness of the natural environment.
- To help children understand that all living things are connected to and dependent on one another.
- To help children begin to understand that responsible management of the natural environment is one of the greatest challenges and moral demands of our time.
- To help children understand the order of living things.
- To sharpen their powers of observation.

These ideas may be explored by families independently of the school program but demonstrate how families and schools may collaborate on school-initiated endeavours.



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The Natural World as a Source of learning

Program Components – BACKYARD*

Insects/Spiders/Earth-worms	Birds/Animals	Exploring Day and Night Sky	Climate and Weather Rain and Snow	Planting a Garden
– first-hand experiences – habitats – how do insects move from one place to another – needs of insects food shelter – how insects help people – caring for insects – what happens to insects during seasons? – awareness of seasonal changes	– how to attract birds bird feeders berry bushes fruit trees – bird watching summer winter spring fall – bird behaviour – migrating birds – examining birds' nests not in use – birds as parents – backyard bird photography – mice, gophers	– sunrise (east) – sunset (west) – chinook arch – cloudwatching and cloud shapes – thunderstorms and lightning – snow and snowstorms – rain formation – the beauty of rainbows – hail, fog – sun dogs – aurora borealis – stargazing the Big Dipper in summer winter – moon phases – shorter days nights – longer days nights – equinox – shadows (sun's position)	– sensory experiences – sunny days (how many?) – wind kinds of wind chinook speed (highest in April & May) – precipitation and sun necessary for growth of plants – weather report temperature – snow as a blanket what life continues under blanket? – winter birds – snow tracks of animals – record of night's activities – tobogganning (velocity) – puddles – rainwear – earthworms in rainy weather	– when to begin planting? (when frost is out of ground) – deciding what to plant likes of family members likes of children in program – digging soil – high elevation short growing season – spring planting fall harvest – caring for garden watering weeding – insects living in soil – earthworms aerating soil – bees pollinating flowers of fruit trees garden enemies aphids eaten by ladybird beetles
ladybird beetles, earthworms, spiders, caterpillars, ants, bees, butterflies, moths, dragonflies, mosquitoes	robins, sparrows, magpies, waxwings, hummingbirds			

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CONTINUITY—ASSUMPTIONS AND ACTIONS

Assumptions Implicit in the Continuity Policy	Continuity-in-Action
Teachers respect children as learners	Within program guidelines teachers and children choose topics, activities, ways of presenting information. Scheduling is flexible.
Skills are taught when needed and in relevant ways.	Ongoing informal assessment is used. Skills instruction arises from children's work and is provided in context
Learners are responsible for their learning	Learning contracts, portfolios and anthologies are used. Learning goals are established and reviewed periodically. Children are involved in self-assessment and in conferences with parents and teachers
Learning experiences are significant in a human sense (morally and intellectually).	Each school determines its major purposes. "Key ideas" can form a framework for school-level instruction decisions. Children relate school experiences to their lives
Children learn with and from peers and from a variety of adults.	Flexible instruction groups, peer teaching and buddy systems are evident. Resource people, including parents, interact with children.
Teachers establish a "community of learners" while respecting the individual	Class goals are discussed. Children work individually, in small groups and large groups. Flexible work schedules predominate. Powerful, shared experiences create a sense of group history
Teachers and children actively seek connections.	Home and school liaison is established. Learning is demystified—teachers, children, parents discuss the nature and process of real learning (meaningful, relevant, lasting).

Assumptions Implicit in the Continuity Policy	Continuity-in-Action
Teachers, children and parents view learning as a personal quest.	Teachers and children are enthusiastic about classroom events. Learners are active inquirers. Learning outcomes are diverse. Unexpected outcomes often shed new insight for the group. A tolerance for uncertainty grows.
Teachers and children use ongoing assessment strategies.	Children have high expectations for their work. Help is sought where problems are encountered. Learning is seen as a search for meaning.
Teachers believe that children learn in diverse ways.	Children are engaged in diverse activities at any one time and throughout the day. Diversity includes groupings, activities, materials, topics, areas including off-campus.
Teachers believe that complex ideas develop over time and with experience.	Key ideas are used as an organizing framework for school-level instruction decisions. Connections with these organizing ideas are actively sought.
Teachers are learners.	Teachers keep journal records in which they reflect on their practices. They actively seek professional development opportunities.
School experiences challenge all participants such that quality in all dimensions is actively pursued.	Teachers and children are actively engaged in inquiry. Deep understanding is sought. Quality is the standard for completed projects.

3 In the School

Looking Ahead

This booklet attempts to clarify program continuity further by exploring where it might lead. School organization, learning materials, instruction decisions and action planning are used to demonstrate the central concepts of the policy: namely, continuity, integration and developmentally appropriate practices. These topics are explored so that administrators can use them as a springboard for thinking about their particular situations.

• • •

School Organization

Continuity can be realized only through practice. A number of organizational practices supportive to the concept are reviewed below.

- Family Multi-Aged Grouping

Family grouping has been frequently used in rural settings, as in the one-room schoolhouse. As well, small urban schools, by virtue of enrolment, often organize classes of two or more grades. Consideration is given to developmental stages, curriculum requirements and personality factors in organizing the groups. However, some schools choose multi-aged grouping for the benefits that may accrue to the children. The advantage for children and teachers alike is that they can spend an extended time together. Where the group includes Grade 1 children, each new intake period means the incorporation of only a few beginners. Older children assume greater responsibility for introducing the newcomers to the community. As well, students help each other and this helps the teacher meet the needs of individual students. Unfortunately, we often

view multi-aged grouping as a disadvantage. Parents are often fearful that essential skills will be neglected. Few locally educated teachers have had preparation in working with family groupings. Therefore, careful planning is necessary before embracing such organization. Such planning includes communication with families. In addition, consideration is given to the curriculum, to teacher expertise and to the children's needs.

- Scheduling

Careful consideration must be given to school schedules; they can impede or enhance continuity. Often because of crowding, schedules become intrusive. Administrators try to give equal access to the gymnasium and other specialized areas within the school. Alleviation of such problems must be a cooperative endeavour in which flexibility is key. Some schools schedule specific times for particular subjects to allow students to move to their most appropriate group for that subject.

- Specialist Teachers

Some elementary schools use specialist teachers. In scheduling such teachers, classroom programs may become fragmented. To overcome this, specialists might be scheduled in blocks of time. Each teacher and each group of children would then have a concentrated engagement with a specialist teacher and with the subject matter. Classroom teachers could keep the specialist's concepts "alive by applying them" and "by helping children relate new information to already acquired concepts" (Harlan 1988 p.10).

- Team Teaching

There is no question that the opportunity to share expertise is valuable. Team teaching represents a personal and school decision. The point of all good programs is that children can initiate, plan, become engaged with and complete worthwhile projects. Whatever the approach used to provide instruction, it must be examined for the extent to which it enhances such opportunities. When instruction is appropriately organized, teachers and children seem less harried, there is time to reflect, to laugh, to see and to hear.

- Team Planning

Team planning has great value. These planning sessions may benefit from involving specialist teachers, subject matter coordinators and other professional staff such as the teacher-librarian. Such planning encourages sharing of expertise and enhances the potential for school-based continuity. Where possible, school administrators should be involved in team planning. By so doing, the concept of the administrator as educational leader may be realized in a very supportive and pragmatic way. Teams for planning may be based on cross-grade groupings, around special projects, within grades and across subject areas.

- Subject Matter Coordinators

Another way to facilitate continuity at the school level is through the use of subject matter coordinators. These people who have some special expertise become the contact person for central office staff. They give leadership to programs in the school, keeping abreast of professional literature, attending workshops, visiting publishers' displays at convention time and piloting new materials.

- Some Other Considerations

We have not accounted for the need for continuity for each child from one classroom one year to the next. This can best be provided when teachers meet, share extensive records, and when teachers and students visit each other's classes. It is also helpful to involve parents. In all this, three elements are essential—that the child's right to confidentiality be respected, that children and families be made aware of what information will be shared and that parental consent be obtained.

Continuity may be facilitated when teachers move with children, that is when the group remains together for two or more years. Moving with the children provides an extended opportunity to facilitate children's growth and our own as we confront new curricula and new resources.

Learning Materials

Selecting Educational Equipment and Materials for School and Home (1986) provides a list of materials for preschool and elementary grades, indicating those that are considered basic and those that are luxury items. As well, the list indicates materials that need to be replaced on a regular basis. The guide can be useful for a school in budget planning and can be of particular value in schools where the administration is not familiar with a specific age group. (See bibliography at end of Booklet 1 in this series.) A brief list of materials that reflect what we know about children and learning is included in Appendix A.

Instruction Design

Critical questions face schools at all levels of instructional decision making. Within the program of studies, each school staff member might well develop a framework for how curricula will be approached. Personal consideration of this may lead to several key ideas. Such ideas will vary given the nature of each teacher, each school and the particular community it serves.

Key ideas can be the basis of an integrated approach. Some key ideas follow:

- Learning to care for the environment (Self-Awareness, Scientific and Mathematical Literacy).
- Learning to live and work well with others (Interpersonal Relationships, Citizenship, Communication).
- Learning how to make sense of our experience (Self-Awareness, Fine Arts).
- Learning to respect and savour human achievements (Communication, Science and Mathematical Literacy, Self-Awareness, Fine Arts).
- Learning how to deal proactively with change (Citizenship, Scientific and Mathematical Literacy).

A set of ideas established by consensus within the school can provide a guiding framework for the implementation of program continuity. Commitment to such a set of ideas is one vehicle to continuity across the school program and to links with the family and community. Commitment to a set of key ideas does not require a particular instruction style but respects each teacher's expertise and

organizational preferences. Nevertheless, attention must be paid to insights from developmental principles as to appropriate practice. School staff members view their world through adult eyes as they conceptualize their goals. However, they must be encouraged to see the world through the eyes of the children as they prepare productive learning environments.

Essentially, what is being discussed is an organizational framework consistent with the concept of continuity and useful for school-level curriculum decisions. Such decisions:

- respect developmental principles
- are sensitive to the contextual aspects of each school, its local community values and needs
- respect system and provincial directions
- allow flexibility given individual classroom dynamics.

Action Planning

In its ECS to Grade 6 emphasis, program continuity respects the school unit as essential in bringing about change. In the case of a community-operated ECS program, mutual collaboration is essential. The school principal has the central role in addressing the policy within school guidelines. A plan may be developed to address the policy specifically, but such a plan is only one aspect of an ongoing school improvement plan that focusses on the learning potential of all school initiatives. How then might a typical elementary school address the policy?

The school administrator might develop a plan such as the following.

1. Staff members are given copies of the policy statement for study purposes before an upcoming professional development session. A resource person is then called on to lead discussion. Such discussion might focus on: continuity, learning experiences, integration, developmentally appropriate practices, shared decision making, multidimensional assessment.

   Following the discussion, working in groups, staff members brainstorm what each of the elements look like in their school and what barriers to implementation they perceive. It is advisable to

have parents and the community liaison people involved in the initial discussion.

2. With an in-depth background gained through exploring the principles of the policy, the staff, parent representatives and community liaison people then examine the philosophy and goals of the school. Critical questions must be asked:

   - Do our philosophy and goals reflect student and staff configurations?
   - Do our philosophy and goals reflect current knowledge and appropriate practice?
   - Are our philosophy and goals consistent with continuity as discussed in the policy statement?

3. Small groups convene to examine beliefs and values about the kind of adults the staff and parents wish the children to become and about the kinds of problems the children will face in the future. Typically, such examination will yield statements about:

   - independence
   - self-reliance
   - ability to work well with others
   - the need to be well informed
   - the ability to solve problems creatively; for example, problems associated with the environment and so on.

   The large group may then reconvene to share small group discussions and to reach a consensus. A good discussion group leader is necessary at this point to help the group develop five or six statements that most can support. These statements then provide a framework for school direction.

4. The next step is the formulation of an action plan. Questions such as the following will guide this plan:

   - Where are we now?
   - Where do we wish to go? (six months, a year, two years?)
   - How will we get there?
   - What resources do we need?
   - How will we know we are on our way?
   - How will we assess the impact on learners?

5. Each teacher, with the support of the staff and parents, then examines his or her practices and program in the light of the preceding plan. What follows is an ongoing growth process as teachers move toward established goals that:

    - respect their own expertise
    - acknowledge limitations
    - respect the developmental levels of the children
    - respect curriculum requirements.

The educational leader supports, guides, challenges, provides professional development opportunities and assesses and reports progress. The complexity of classrooms and the multifaceted nature of the change process are respected at all times.

The preceding plan is but one approach taken by a school in addressing program continuity. It is expected that each school jurisdiction will develop local initiatives consistent with the intent of the policy.

Throughout this booklet care has been taken to respect the uniqueness of each school. Thus, no attempt has been made to specify in a step-by-step manner the way to achieve continuity. Each school, having carefully explored the policy statement, must consider steps toward implementation. In each case implementation will be guided by system policies and will respect the particular context of the school, its community, its families, its staff. As suggested throughout this document, clearly some specific practices reflect the assumptions that have shaped the program continuity policy. As a guide for schools, Appendix B details some of these assumptions and suggests how each might translate into practice or continuity-in-action. Schools and individual teachers may wish to use this list as a starting point, as a way to establish an entry point and as a sign post for continuing development. As progress is made each school will modify and extend the list, specifying more fully their progress toward achieving continuity for each learner.

Discussion Topics

As the school assesses its current practices are there some meanings of continuity that have not been addressed to date? If so, what is the next step?

What school organizational practices encourage continuity? For example, is team planning used, within grades, across grades, within curriculum areas; do we use family groups; are teachers encouraged to change teaching assignments?

In what ways are families involved in school programs?

Has the school established school purposes and directions so that each teacher can align his or her practices?

Does the school acquaint new teachers and new families with these purposes and directions?

Does the school review its purposes and directions on a regular basis?

Are the organizational practices in the school consistent with program continuity? What restrictions must be taken into account?

In what ways does the timetable facilitate continuity?

Is the school equipped in a manner that accommodates continuity?

Is the staff familiar with developmental indicators and the concepts and intent behind program continuity?

What part does the concept of continuity play in the evaluation of school practice?

How will students successfully demonstrate that they have reached the goals for program continuity?

Materials Reflecting What is Known About Children and Learning*

Mathematics and Science

balances
thermometers
magnifying glasses
magnets
calibrated beakers
measuring spoons
recipe cards
artifacts
plants
insects
beakers
food colouring
detergent
boats
containers of various sizes
funnels
cans with holes punched at various levels
jugs for pouring
siphons
tubing
pumps
Cuisenaire rods
Dienes blocks
Unifix cubes
pet cages and pets
dice
geoboards
peg boards
unit blocks
hollow blocks
Tinkertoys
architectural blueprints
photographs pictures of buildings
accessory blocks
construction toys
accessory blocks
squared paper
construction material such as Lego
old appliances
receptacles
beakers
sifters
funnels
measuring spoons
containers of varied sizes shapes
water
toys such as plastic boats, cars, trucks
cookie cutters
calculator
adding machine
measuring tapes
counters
bean sticks

Language and Literacy

writing tools
paper
books
magazines
audiotapes
tape recorder
ear phones
stapler
typewriter
books
paper and pencil
computer

Drama

dress-up clothes
hospital artifacts
utensils
telephones
food packages
post office artifacts
shopping artifacts
home artifacts

*These are suggested resources and materials only.

Art

fabric crayons
paper
scissors
glue
fabric
hole punch
yarn
crayons
felt markers
paint
scraps
found material such as
styrofoam
boxes
paint brushes
straws
string
modelling clay
stir sticks

Music

rhythm instruments
records and record
player
tapes and tape player
xylophone
Orff instruments
recorders
ukeleles
autoharp
drums

Integrated Practical Activities

wood scraps
tools – hammer,
screwdriver, saw
clamp, hand drill
glue
styrofoam
paint
nails
cooking utensils –
bowls,
measuring spoons,
beaters, etc.
recipe cards

Continuity—Assumptions and Actions

Assumptions Implicit in the Continuity Policy	Continuity-in-Action
Teachers respect children as learners.	Within program guidelines teachers and children choose topics, activities, ways of presenting information. Scheduling is flexible.
Skills are taught when needed and in relevant ways.	Ongoing informal assessment is used. Skills instruction arises from children's work and is provided in context.
Learners are responsible for their learning.	Learning contracts, portfolios and anthologies are used. Learning goals are established and reviewed periodically. Children are involved in self-assessment and in conferences with parents and teachers.
Learning experiences are significant in a human sense (morally and intellectually).	Each school determines its major purposes. "Key ideas" can form a framework for school-level instruction decisions. Children relate school experiences to their lives.
Children learn with and from peers and from a variety of adults.	Flexible instruction groups, peer teaching and buddy systems are evident. Resource people, including parents, interact with children.
Teachers establish a "community of learners" while respecting the individual.	Class goals are discussed. Children work individually, in small groups and large groups. Flexible work schedules predominate. Powerful, shared experiences create a sense of group history.

Assumptions Implicit in the Continuity Policy	Continuity-in-Action
Teachers and children actively seek connections.	Home and school liaison is established Learning is demystified—teachers, children, parents discuss the nature and process of real learning (meaningful, relevant, lasting).
Teachers, children and parents view learning as a personal quest.	Teachers and children are enthusiastic about classroom events. Learners are active inquirers. Learning outcomes are diverse. Unexpected outcomes often shed new insight for the group. A tolerance for uncertainty grows.
Teachers and children use ongoing assessment strategies.	Children have high expectations for their work. Help is sought where problems are encountered. Learning is seen as a search for meaning
Teachers believe that children learn in diverse ways.	Children are engaged in diverse activities at any one time and throughout the day. Diversity includes groupings, activities, materials, topics, areas including off-campus.
Teachers believe that complex ideas develop over time and with experience.	Key ideas are used as an organizing framework for school-level instruction decisions. Connections with these organizing ideas are actively sought.
Teachers are learners.	Teachers keep journal records in which they reflect on their practices. They actively seek professional development opportunities.
School experiences challenge all participants such that quality in all dimensions is actively pursued.	Teachers and children are actively engaged in inquiry. Deep understanding is sought. Quality is the standard for completed projects.

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4 Between Home and School

Looking Ahead

This booklet briefly examines ways to enhance mutual understanding and respect among families, schools, parents and teachers.*

• • •

It is an increasingly complex world. Within all this complexity, parents and teachers share a common goal. They want their children, their students, to survive, to build on their strengths, to lead productive, responsible lives, to succeed. The evidence suggests that no other single focus has the potential to be as productive for students as the close linking of home and school, of parents and teachers. Reflecting this, *The School Act* (1989) endorses the involvement of parents in schools. This involvement may take a variety of forms (see Appendix A).

An increasing body of literature acknowledges and documents:

- the role of the family as providing the primary educational environment
- the enduring effect of parental involvement in schools
- the impact of parental involvement on school achievement.

* Readers are also referred to the Alberta Education document, *Bridges to Learning*. This document is available to jurisdictions through Central Support Services.

Children spend much of their time at home. The people there—parents, siblings, grandparents—may or may not reflect messages like "reading is a desirable way to spend time" or "talking about things helps you understand them better" or "being observant is a good thing." When they do, and when these messages are consistent with those given by teachers, children are far more likely to learn them. A student whose parent(s) is acquainted with the teacher is likely to learn more than if that connection did not exist. This link begins at the beginning: when, for example, the parent accompanies the child to a new school and parent(s) and child meet the teacher(s) for the first time.

The more the parent is linked to the teacher, the more likelihood there is of "good consensus between settings and an evolving power in favour of the developing person" (Bronfenbrenner 1979, p. 212). That is, rather than being caught in a potential conflict between parental and teacher expectations, the child is likely to find that parent and teacher expectations are similar and to experience this consensus as supportive and affirmative. When the student sees her parent visit the class, talk to the teacher or when a personal note from the teacher is read to the student, the likelihood increases that the student will feel that her two worlds overlap and that she is at home, and empowered. As Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggests, a key to the enhanced effectiveness of public education lies not within the school itself, but in its interconnections—in this case, the school's connections with the family.

When the link between the home and the school is strong, the school setting is more family-like and the family is more school-like. The latter condition is met when parents function by encouraging the student's development through discussion, reading, approval of school work, respect for children's efforts, provision of regular quiet time and so forth. The "family-like" school treats students as unique individuals. Students feel part of a school family that is concerned for their welfare. The evidence is strong that successful students establish close family-like ties to teachers. When the two worlds of the child move closer together, they no longer exist as separate and exclusive spheres of influence. When the home and school work successfully together, change occurs both at home and at school and the two environments become increasingly similar, familiar and safe for children. Many homes and schools do work together in just this way to the benefit of the students involved.

Still, in this discussion of the need for, and value of strong home and school links and of the impact of parental involvement, there is a danger that several realities—those of the parent and those of the teacher—will be ignored. Schools and teachers come to see parents who do not volunteer—who do not come to school for parent's night—as not interested in their children's education. It is important to remind ourselves that just as teachers who are parents cannot volunteer at their children's schools, most parents simply cannot be at school during the day.

This has implications for how we go about setting up home and school links. For example, some schools conduct workshops to help parents parent. But parents will not be able to come if they work or have other responsibilities. The focus here must be on the number of parents who get the information, not on the number of parents who come to the school at a designated time. The challenge is to find new ways to share information, to use technology to help us to reach more parents. Using a variety of communication means may be part of the answer—audio recording, videotapes, summaries, newsletters, computerized telephone messages, radio, local cable television. We need to know not only whether messages are going home but who understands them and who does not, who is being reached and who is not.

The literature speaks of the need for schools (and teachers, in particular) to reach out to involve parents. Many parents are uneasy about contacting the school if they have concerns about their child's academic progress. However, most parents value teachers who initiate contact with them about their children's progress and are responsive to that initiative.

While many parents would like teachers to take the initiative, and feel uneasy taking the initiative themselves, teachers are often equally reluctant to approach parents. In a 1987 survey, half the teachers said parents did not make enough effort to approach them to talk about their children's education, and over half said they felt uneasy or reluctant to approach parents (Metropolitan Life Survey 1987). Typically, efforts to involve parents drop dramatically as early as the second or third year of schooling. When teachers and administrators develop parent involvement programs in the upper levels, parents are responsive.

Parents of children at all grade levels want to stay informed and involved. First, they want to know what is going on in school and how their child is doing. Often, this is expressed in terms of grade expectations. Second, they want to know how "the system" works and how they can be part of it. Third, they want to know what they can do with their child at home to help him or her achieve in school.

The often ignored reality is the uneasiness in taking the initiative, in reaching out, to begin working together.

The other reality commonly overlooked is that both parents and teachers are often over-committed. All of this talk about greater parental involvement, about schools and teachers reaching out to parents, fails to reflect the overwhelming demands on both parents and teachers. It is easy enough to say parents should do more or teachers should do more. Such statements almost always ensure that things stay the same, that both parents and teachers feel blamed, guilty and that nothing productive happens.

Whatever solutions or strategies we use to strengthen the home school link must take into account the growing pressures on both parents and teachers. Ironically, this pressure is one neither group would pass on to young people but as Brazelton stresses, just look at yourself if you work or live with young people and if you're stressed, they are too (Hales and Hales 1989). Whatever we try we must work from the model of a healthy relationship, one in which both parents and teachers share their skills, knowledge and time for the growth and enrichment of all involved. Our efforts must speak to reciprocity. A first step is not to ignore either the uneasiness of parents and teachers and their very real time pressures.

Currently, not all families become involved in school-related activities or show interest in their children's school work. Nor do all schools actively encourage parental involvement. Needless to say, many teachers and parents remain less than sure how to effect a helpful and close liaison.

Schools, curricula, teaching and learning approaches and the family have all undergone dramatic changes. Parents and teachers need support in understanding what schools and families are doing and the reasons behind current concerns. Mutual understanding and respect is an essential first step if continuity for the child is to be achieved.

There are many ways in which parents can support the school, but however they provide such support it needs to be meaningful to both the parents and the school. Some ways they can be supportive are:

- volunteering
- serving on the school council
- fund raising
- home-based projects such as paired reading.

The goals of parent involvement include:

- establishing mutual trust and rapport
- ensuring that home and school experiences for the child complement one another
- building better public awareness of the complex role schools play in today's society
- meaningfully linking the home and school.

And there are many ways in which schools can and do support families. Many schools now work cooperatively with parents to organize lunchroom provision and before- and after-school care, both of which reflect the changing role of families. Teachers and schools have special expertise and resources that can be shared through:

- parent information evenings
- brief but pertinent newsletters
- parent areas where parenting materials are available
- provision of materials for use at home (see Appendix B).

So what are some ways to establish mutual respect at the beginning of the school year? Where a teacher is newly appointed to a school, brief personal notes of welcome might be written to each child late in August requesting that the child reply and enclose a photograph. The latter is particularly helpful in learning children's names quickly and sets a warm, positive tone to the beginning of school. Where teachers are continuing their employment at the same school, arrangements can be made for orientation visits late in the spring.

In both cases, family information sessions early in the fall provide an opportunity to get to know one another and to discuss the upcoming year. At that time classroom volunteers might be solicited and a time planned to establish mutual expectations. Some schools have

developed a handbook for volunteers that specifies ethics, and provides an overview of their role and its value.

Parents often like to be engaged directly with their child's classroom. For many families, volunteer time during class hours is not possible but they are willing to contribute some time at home. For example, paired reading where children and parents or siblings read books together on a regular basis is accompanied by an increase in reading achievement.

There is no doubt that parental involvement at the level of the child and her program and teacher rather than school as a whole is the much more certain route to increasing children's opportunities and learning. Several studies indicate that when parents help their child at home in a particular subject, it is likely to increase the student's achievement in that subject.

While home-based projects support individual achievement, some parents enjoy the advisory role of a school council. The literature supports this role as part of comprehensive, long-term involvement opportunities for parents.

What follows are some ways schools and teachers might involve parents. (Of course, before going ahead with any of these it might be wise to ask your parents what they want to do, how they want to be involved.)

- Arrange for a parent to act as a parent-in-residence for the school.
- Have a "parent of the year."
- Take home short notes or phone calls, to pass on positive comments about the student; about the student's classwork; involvement in the life of the school; efforts to grow, take initiative, express themselves.
- Have regular class get-togethers of student, parents and teacher to share class projects, performances or work. For example, 1) student-made slides and tape production, 2) ethnic dinners prepared by the class, and 3) choral, speech or drama productions.
- Set up social gatherings (off school premises) for parents and staff. Examples: potluck dinners, sports events.

- Encourage "open door" classrooms—local adult visits, informally and formally to contribute to class knowledge of careers, lifestyle and life skills.
- Make home visits.
- Encourage the participation of parents in group sessions, career days or classroom instruction.
- Have students make newsletters, published on a regular basis, to inform parents about matters of interest to them.
- Arrange periodic meetings with parents to help monitor the student's school success (the traditional parent–teacher conference). Setting evening hours may make such meetings more accessible.
- Arrange holiday and special event open houses where students, parents and teachers do things together.
- Have parent study skill assistance workshops taught by teachers and PTA members.
- Encourage students to use homework hotlines for problems encountered.
- Use local television radio spots to encourage parent support and interest in schools.
- Develop subject-by-subject expectation guidelines to be mailed to parents.
- Use computer hardware and software on parenting skills available for check out.

At times the different roles of parents and teachers must be respected. While parents know their children best, teachers know the dynamics of their class and have special expertise in dealing with the great variety of needs, interests and capabilities. In essence, continuity is fostered for the child when home and school establish mutual trust and respect.

Discussion Topics

How will we involve parents?

In what ways are families welcomed to our school? In my classroom?

What messages do our classrooms convey to visitors?

How do we ensure that families understand our approaches to teaching and learning?

Do I as a teacher or as an administrator provide a variety of ways for parents to share responsibility for the education of their children?

How are parents who work outside the home given appropriate opportunities to support the school?

What special provision is made for families' cultural backgrounds and values?

Are parents aware of the power of home environments in promoting learning?

How do we communicate developmentally appropriate practices to colleagues and parents?

FIVE MAJOR TYPES OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT*	
Type 1	The *basic obligations of parents* refers to the responsibilities of families to ensure children's health and safety; to the parenting and child-rearing skills needed to prepare children for school; to the continual need to supervise, discipline and guide children at each age level; and to the need to build *positive home conditions* that support school learning and behaviour appropriate for each grade level.
Type 2	The *basic obligations of schools* refers to the *communications from school to home* about school programs and children's progress. Schools vary the form and frequency of communications such as memos, notices, report cards and conferences, and greatly affect whether the information about school programs and children's progress can be understood by all parents.
Type 3	*Parent involvement at school* refers to parent *volunteers* who assist teachers, administrators and children in classrooms, in other areas of the school or in ECS programs. It also refers to parents who come to school to support student performances, sports or other events, or to attend workshops or other programs for their own education or training.
Type 4	*Parent involvement in learning activities at home* refers to parent-initiated activities or child-initiated requests for help, and ideas or instructions from teachers for parents to monitor or *assist their own children* at home on learning activities that are coordinated with the children's classwork.
Type 5	*Parent involvement in school councils* refers to parents taking *advisory* roles in parent–teacher associations, school councils or other committees or groups at the ECS program or school system level. It also refers to parent and community *activists* in independent advocacy groups that monitor the schools and work for school improvement.

*A continuum of possible parental involvement (adapted from J.L. Epstein 1988). Examples of Practices to Promote, and Outcomes From, the Five Types of Parent Involvement.

Suggestions For Parents

As an administrator or teacher, you may want to make use of materials such as the following two examples in your work with parents.

"Do you have any homework?" That is probably the most frequently repeated communication between students and their parents. What can parents do to get their students to do their homework on their own? Here are some ideas:

- Discuss and refresh the commonly stated purposes of homework: review the material they learned that day; encourage independent trial and error that only they can do; extend the classroom by requiring time and attention to creativity.
- Provide the stimulation intellectually and aesthetically to set the stage to encourage and create an inviting study environment.
- Be specific when inquiring about homework. Assume the student has work to do and discuss it subject by subject.
- Pay attention to what the student is doing, show interest and support.
- Avoid edicts on time, such as "You will sit there for an hour." Avoid making homework a punishment.
- Encourage and affirm the students as they work; praise their efforts.
- Be careful when checking to ensure that the homework is done. This can divert the task to simply getting it done to patronize mom and dad.
- Don't back off completely and turn the job of completing homework over to them. Avoid extremes of being overly involved or uninvolved.
- When students become frustrated, be there to support them but don't fall into the trap of doing their homework for them. Don't encourage dependency.
- Make it your business to know homework guidelines in each class and what students can do when they don't understand something or how to obtain help.
- Limit television viewing time. This forces the student to plan his or her time.
- Establish a regular time and place for home study; take a stand on the value of studying.

- Occasionally allow students to study with friends, as it is one means of encouraging studying. However, in most cases it should not be an everyday occurrence.
- Do not allow homework to become the source of chronic argument, conflict, fighting or nagging. This will result in an unproductive, antagonistic relationship between parent and student.
- Develop a mutually agreeable study schedule, monitor student achievement of stated goals. Be consistent.
- Model reading by bringing the family together for short periods of quiet reading.

How can we help our children?

This is a question asked by most parents.

- Discuss you children's program with the teacher.
- Encourage your children to share with you their perceptions of their progress.
- Read to your children.
- Encourage your children to read for information and relaxation Your children will probably adopt your reading habits.
- Help your children to choose books that appeal to their personal hobbies and interests.
- Set aside a special time to discuss with your children the books they are reading. You can discuss the characters, plot. setting and their opinions of the book.
- Select books, records and tapes as gifts.
- Discuss television programs with your children.
- Accompany your children to the library and ask the librarian to help you with the selection of some high-interest books.
- Set some time aside each week to engage your children in conversation about school and or help them with their school work. You may not be the expert but do not let this stop you.
- Expose your children to a variety of cultural activities. Your local paper usually will inform you of upcoming events. Be sure to attend the activity with your children.
- Be positive in all matters relating to your children's school experience. Remember that your children's attitudes will reflect your own.

Adapted from *What Every Parent Should Know: French Language Arts.* Alberta Education, 1989.

Program Continuity:
Elementary Education in Action

5 Assessment in the Classroom

Looking Ahead

This booklet outlines various approaches to documenting the growth of learners. The emphasis is on methods that enhance the essential continuity between assessment and learning experiences.

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Assessment is something we all do all the time. Our personal assessments may not be as organized or formal as standardized tests or graded quizzes, but they are just as real. What we are particularly interested in is using assessment to help students in their learning, to recognize and build on existing strengths, and to help us develop strategies to assist students in overcoming their weaknesses. Within the context of the classroom, there are some things that can be done to make assessment more useful:

- Collections of students' work are probably the single best tool for showing "progress." If students have the choice of what goes into such a collection, it is even better. Students really do know when what they do is good.
- Try to have several techniques available for everything you want to assess. Tape recorders for poor writers, butcher paper and paints for those into drawing and wood for model builders. (Yes, answers can be given that are not words.)
- Spend time discussing diagnostic assessments with individual students. Discussion includes listening.
- Tell students which assessments are being used for reporting and which are not.

For the most part, assessment practices with children should be formative in nature. We need to find out what each child is accomplishing and then use this information as a guideline or sign post

for our continuing work together. What is needed is to find out what the child is trying to do and help him her do it. Furthermore, we need to refocus on the root word of evaluation, that of "value," and on evaluation as a process of reasserting what we value in classrooms. And if we affirm the responsibility of the learner in learning, then we must carry our affirmation into the assessment process. At least, the process must be collaborative in nature.

So what does this look like in practice?

First, we need to employ a variety of assessment strategies. Through these we begin to build a composite picture of the child. Such developmentally appropriate strategies include:

- Multiple assessments over time.
- Variety of assessment techniques, e.g., observation, checklists, paper-pencil tests, journals, portfolios of work samples, diagnostic and criterion-referenced tests.
- Self-evaluation.
- Teacher- and student-initiated evaluation.
- Reporting as comments on student learning rather than ratings (e.g., percentages or letters), especially ECS to Grade 3.
- Parental involvement.
- Emphasis on growth.

Second, each child must be intimately involved in the process. He or she must understand that assessment is key to ongoing planning, in helping to decide what experiences and what activities are necessary. Moreover, we have a responsibility to keep parents informed of progress and to elicit their input, respecting the importance of the family in the development of the child. We also have a responsibility to communicate to parents openly and honestly where their child is in terms of the graded curriculum. Finally, our responsibility is not just to students and parents but to other teachers and the school board. (See *The School Act* 1989, Section 13e.)

Third, despite our best efforts, some children will elude us and we will need to draw on the expertise of others in the diagnostic process.

Key strategies for assessing learning outcomes follow.

Observation

Developing the skill of doing less and observing more is one sure way of improving assessment. Of course, observations are most useful when they are recorded in an organized fashion. While anecdotal records can be used to document our observations, despite the best of intentions they often don't get written. Finding a system of recording observations that is workable is the first step.

Some teachers carry a portable dictaphone, others carry a pocket-sized notebook with an attached pen, others keep record books in each learning area of the classroom. Sometimes it is helpful to carry a checklist to help focus, although the purists decry such a practice as narrowing our vision and giving closure to our interpretation before the evidence is in. The advent of "yellow stickies," while expensive, can be a boon. These small, self-adhesive note pads allow a brief note to be affixed to the child's folder and save rewriting at the end of a hectic day. It may be helpful to schedule observations, a few children each day, to ensure that no child is overlooked. Typically we overlook the well-behaved, eager-to-please children as our attention is diverted to more assertive behaviour.

The advent of personal computers has been a help to efficient record keeping. One proficient teacher transfers her observational records to a disk in just five minutes at the end of each day. This is a skill worth acquiring and mastering, for if the computer program is well planned, reporting can be greatly facilitated.

What is known generally about children that helps guide our observations? A profile of typical development indicators, loosely organized into three age groups, younger primary ($4^1/_2$ to $6^1/_2$ years), older primary ($6^1/_2$ to $8^1/_2$ years) and upper elementary ($8^1/_2$ to $12^1/_2$ years) can be found in Appendix A. All that can be usefully offered are indicators that are important to classroom decisions. While these generalizations are based on large populations, each child will exhibit a unique pattern of development and learning needs based on past experience, health and emotional well-being, activity, time of day, motivation, interest and so on.

Portfolio

A recent idea in the literature on assessment deserves attention. Each child, in collaboration with the teacher, compiles a portfolio of work throughout the year. The portfolio has two significant functions.

First, it comprises a personal and significant record of the child's journey.
Second, it provides the means by which progress is assessed. The child would select work of which he or she is proud and that is representative of the various school activities undertaken. The portfolio might contain:

- photographs
- personal information
- written comments from the teacher, the child, the parent
- work samples
- test samples
- artwork
- summaries of work completed, such as skills mastered in mathematics.

At several points throughout the year, perhaps to correspond with reporting periods, the teacher and the child would review the portfolio; the review would also be preparation for the parent–teacher–child conference. The review would reflect on past achievements and difficulties and contribute to establishing an agenda for the weeks to come. Such an approach, if pursued seriously and diligently would lead to a valuable product, a record for each family, of their child's progress.

As well, the portfolio could be a useful document for acquainting the child's next teacher with his or her progress, interests and needs in preparation for an upcoming year. As such, it would be a key support document as teachers meet to review a past year's program and to set tentative plans for the future. Once again, continuity is enhanced.

Checklists

Checklists can be very useful documents in several ways. First, they remind us of all dimensions of a particular area of development or study. Thus, a checklist is a self-evaluation tool, helping us to keep on track, to avoid neglecting areas that we perhaps do not find that interesting.

Second, they can indicate concisely to children what skills they are expected to master.

Third, they give focus to our observations and reporting.

Fourth, they greatly simplify and make manageable the demands of reporting.

Nevertheless, despite the benefits, checklists are limited as these short-hand descriptors neglect contextual information.

Checklists can be derived from unit plans or from published lists. Teachers are advised to collect such lists for future reference. However, these need to be culled periodically. For example, the movement to a "whole language" philosophy has influenced our choice of language arts assessment materials.

Diagnostic Tools

Knowledge about each student's abilities and skills is essential for matching learning activities to the needs of the learner. Such information may be collected in a variety of ways. Diagnostic tools provide a systematic approach to gathering this information. They enable teachers and students to identify strengths and weaknesses as they develop in the course of learning. Such tools are most useful in making decisions that help students build on what they have already accomplished and are most often used to determine students' reading, writing and mathematical ability. (An example of a diagnostic tool is the Provincial Diagnostic Reading Program.)

Such tools should be used to inform teachers, students, parents and anyone else concerned about each student's mastery of specific skills—not to compare that student to others. It might be beneficial to involve the student over time in the process of diagnosis, how it's done

and what it means, and then share with the student the very real indicators of skills mastery that appear.

In gathering diagnostic information to make decisions that best meet the needs of students, it may be necessary to reach beyond the classroom to other teachers or beyond that into the community itself. Students, parents and teachers may benefit from information that only specialists can gather (e.g., psychologists, speech therapists). Teachers should not hesitate to make a referral if they have a reason to suspect a referral may help them, the parents and the student in making better choices.

Standardized Achievement Tests

This form of assessment has a specific and useful place in providing data about how schools and school systems are functioning. Some schools and districts administer standardized tests such as the Canadian Test of Basic Skills in addition to the Provincial Achievement Tests in Grade 3 and Grade 6. Provided we acknowledge the nature of the data that such tests yield, they can provide another important source of data. Children do need to learn how to take such tests. They should know about the environments under which testing occurs, about preparing for tests and about machine-scored test papers. Teachers are referred to Miriam Cohen's *First Grade Takes a Test*, an amusing yet poignant reminder of the use and abuse of tests and of the "right" and "wrong" answer and how these are obtained. (See bibliography at end of Booklet 1 in this series.)

Reporting

The most useful form of communicating to parents at this stage in the child's development is the conference. However, effective conferences demand more in preparation time than a written report.

First, all appropriate information is gathered and summarized.

Second, the teacher has a conference with the child to review progress and to discuss the upcoming family conference. (For the sake of fairness and objectivity, students should play an active role in planning conferences. See Appendix B for suggestions for implementing this.)

Third, the teacher contacts the parents, outlines the areas that he or she wishes to address and asks parents to do the same. In this way, the conference plan is established in advance. On the occasion of the conference a comfortable environment is established. Where possible, comfortable chairs, all of the same height, are arranged around a work table where work samples and other pertinent materials are assembled. The teacher welcomes parents and the child, where appropriate, and the conference begins with attention to parents' questions first, followed by the teacher's input. Finally, a conference summary is developed that captures the discussion and plans that have been established. All partners sign the summary form. Self-inking paper allows both family and school to maintain a copy.

Where a written report is required, a combination of strategies seems to be most appropriate. The report gives a brief summary of the curriculum content covered during the reporting period. This may be followed by a checklist, together with anecdotal comments. The checklist allows some brevity while the anecdotal section allows the teacher to personalize the information provided. Of course, individual districts and schools will have policies that will guide decisions as to format and frequency of reports. One interesting approach is to encourage children to write their own report cards, using whatever format is required. The teacher also compiles a report and a collaborative effort is the final result. Once again, such an approach reinforces the belief that the learner is responsible for the learning.

Self-Appraisal

Self-appraisal helps students recognize their own strengths and weaknesses. By doing activities that require self-assessment, students also gain immediate feedback as well as insight into what is taking place as they are learning. Effectively assessing one's effort is a crucial part of learning. The teacher can be instrumental in helping students assess their progress.

Alternately, students may help each other review their performance. Listening to how one student goes about a task may prompt another student to examine his or her personal effort.

Self-appraisal may involve the use of such questions as:

- What steps am I taking to improve my understanding of this topic?
- What methods of study do I use most?
- How am I organizing my material? Does this approach help me remember information?
- What am I doing when I read? How might I become an even better reader?
- What did I find most interesting? Most Boring? Most difficult?
- Did I understand and follow the directions?
- Was I pleased by my efforts?

Teachers might try modelling such questions in their discussions with students. This is one way students learn to reflect on and assess their actions as well as their own problem-solving and decision-making efforts.

Discussion Topics

What procedures are currently employed to assess the growth of students?

How is the information conveyed to parents and to other teachers? Are there useful published materials—checklists, skills lists, etc., that might facilitate assessment procedures?

How are the results of standardized tests currently used, including the Grade 3 and Grade 6 Achievement Tests?

How do children and parents contribute to assessment procedures?

Are assessment procedures representative of the school program and in keeping with the program continuity?

Are you using all the alternatives open to you in making your assessments?

How are you providing for ongoing self-evaluation?

How is continuity reflected in the teacher' s choices of evaluation assessment practices?

Developmental Indicators

Younger Primary Child

Physical

Rapid growth may be accompanied by coordination loss
Fine muscle coordination often weak
High energy but subject to fatigue.
Right Left dominance developing

Emotional

Friendships are important
Enjoys routines
Anxiety about for example, security acceptance. Developing empathetic responses

Language

Rapid growth—enjoys rhymes, nonsense verse.
Overgeneralized rules, for example plurals and tenses
Growth in literacy skills
Retells stories and shares original stories
Begins to print stories using invented spelling

Social

Cooperative, compliant, polite but wants a reason for rules.
Understands rules in relation to a specific situation
Works with peers and alone
Interests often tied to the immediate.
Generally relies on the goodwill and guidance of adults.

Intellectual

Uses all senses to explore the world.
Curious and enthusiastic about learning
Cause-and-effect relationships of interest but linkages may differ from those of adults.
Action and thought may be concurrent or interchangeable throughout an activity.
Interested in symbolic forms.
Generally likes to complete tasks

Older Primary Child

Physical

More stable growth period allows for improvement in coordination and endurance improves, skills are practised and refined.
Visual acuity strength balance and speed improve
High energy but subject to fatigue.
Right Left dominance established.

Emotional

Peer acceptance is important Begins to assert independence from adults and may seek new models.
Needs to feel in control of situations.
Learns appropriate ways to express feelings.

Language

Uses language to express and clarify ideas.
Poses own questions and seeks answers.
Literacy skills continue to expand.
Uses print to gain information
Concern for mechanics may impede flow of writing.

Social

Generally very compliant and accepting of rules.
Enjoys working with peers and seeks approval
Outgoing, developing wider interests.
Moves from reliance on adults to greater independence.

Intellectual

Listening skills develop.
Interested in collecting and classifying
Predicts, gathers information and evaluates outcomes.
Concrete materials but can also reflect on actions.
Generally thinks before acting.
Generally avoids being deceived by perception.
Conserves: focuses on parts while retaining an image of the whole.
Displays reversible thought: predicts and anticipates.
Uses a variety of symbolic forms to represent concrete experience.
Demonstrates greater concern for details

Upper Elementary Child

Physical

Rapid and uneven growth at onset of puberty (11–13 girls, 12–14 boys) accompanied by restlessness, fatigue.
Awkwardness may occur with growth spurt. Strength levels vary greatly.
Energetic, appetite increases.

Emotional

May show interest in close friendships with same sex.
Begins to seek identity through comparison with peers.
Interest in opposite sex usually explored within the safety of the group.
Demonstrates increased responsibility and confidence
Starts to test limits imposed by others

Language

Argumentation skills develop.
Discussion strategies extend.
Begins to listen critically
Literacy skills develop in complexity
Critical reading skills expand with a sensitivity to textual features.
Becoming skilled in content reading strategies
Writing demonstrates attention to effect on audience

Social

Begins to challenge rules.
Has strong need for belonging. Peer groups, especially same sex groups, assume greater importance.
Interest in social issues emerges
Reliance on adults decreases as greater independence is achieved and as peers become more important.

Intellectual	Memory improves dramatically Sorts and organizes information Appreciates the impact of change on the physical and social environment. Makes predictions and tests them Begins to think about abstract ideas and to seek and analyse relationships between actions and ideas Develops increasingly logical and complex plans to direct action. Explores a variety of viewpoints Seeks alternative solutions to problems Begins to manipulate symbolic forms without reference to direct concrete experience Demonstrates greater concern for details

The Student: A Key Participant in the Parent–Teacher Conference

(Beverly Hubert, *CEA Newsletter*, October 89)

The author makes the following recommendations for how one might go about involving students in parent–teacher conferences. (Note: the recommendations address the school staff but may easily be used by teachers.)

1. As a staff, clearly define the purpose of including students in the conference and be prepared to convince others of its value.

2. Gain the support of parents and senior administration for this concept as assistance in the form of additional time for conferences may be required.

3. Maintain open communication with parents about the new format for conferences and offer them the option of having a conference that includes the student. Don't mandate anything!

4. Discuss the purpose of this format with students and work with them to develop questions they may want to ask.

5. Prepare for each conference by developing questions that involve both students and parents in the conversation.

6. Evaluate the conference period and seek input from all participants in the interest of improving future conferences.

Continuity—Assumptions and Actions

Assumptions Implicit in the Continuity Policy	Continuity-in-Action
Teachers respect children as learners	Within program guidelines teachers and children choose topics, activities, ways of presenting information. Scheduling is flexible.
Skills are taught when needed and in relevant ways.	Ongoing informal assessment is used. Skills instruction arises from children's work and is provided in context.
Learners are responsible for their learning.	Learning contracts, portfolios and anthologies are used. Learning goals are established and reviewed periodically. Children are involved in self-assessment and in conferences with parents and teachers.
Learning experiences are significant in a human sense (morally and intellectually).	Each school determines its major purposes. "Key ideas" can form a framework for school-level instruction decisions. Children relate school experiences to their lives.
Children learn with and from peers and from a variety of adults.	Flexible instruction groups, peer teaching and buddy systems are evident. Resource people, including parents, interact with children.
Teachers establish a "community of learners" while respecting the individual.	Class goals are discussed. Children work individually, in small groups and large groups. Flexible work schedules predominate. Powerful, shared experiences create a sense of group history.
Teachers and children actively seek connections.	Home and school liaison is established. Learning is demystified—teachers, children, parents discuss the nature and process of real learning (meaningful, relevant, lasting).

Assumptions Implicit in the Continuity Policy	Continuity-in-Action
Teachers, children and parents view learning as a personal quest.	Teachers and children are enthusiastic about classroom events. Learners are active inquirers. Learning outcomes are diverse. Unexpected outcomes often shed new insight for the group. A tolerance for uncertainty grows.
Teachers and children use ongoing assessment strategies.	Children have high expectations for their work. Help is sought where problems are encountered. Learning is seen as a search for meaning.
Teachers believe that children learn in diverse ways.	Children are engaged in diverse activities at any one time and throughout the day. Diversity includes groupings, activities, materials, topics, areas including off-campus.
Teachers believe that complex ideas develop over time and with experience.	Key ideas are used as an organizing framework for school-level instruction decisions. Connections with these organizing ideas are actively sought.
Teachers are learners.	Teachers keep journal records in which they reflect on their practices. They actively seek professional development opportunities.
School experiences challenge all participants such that quality in all dimensions is actively pursued.	Teachers and children are actively engaged in inquiry. Deep understanding is sought. Quality is the standard for completed projects.

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Program Continuity:

Elementary Education In Action

1. An Introduction
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3. In the School
4. Between Home and School
5. Assessment in the Classroom